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A short history of the Naval Postgraduate School

Monterey, California, Naval Postgraduate School

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Public Affairs Office
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 Monterey, California

A Short History of the Naval Postgraduate School

The idea for a graduate education program for naval officers first emerged in the late 19th century but, initially, the concept found few advocates. With Marconi's invention of the "wireless" in 1901, the Wright brothers' flight in 1903, and the global trek of the steam-powered White Fleet from 1907 to 1909, belief that advanced education for U.S. naval officers could be intrinsically valuable to the Navy gained support.

On June 9, 1909, less than four months after the completion of the record-setting world cruise of the Great White Fleet, Secretary of the Navy George von L. Meyer signed General Order No. 27, Establishing a school of marine engineering at Annapolis.

This small program, consisting of 10 officer students and two Navy instructors, would later become today's Naval Postgraduate School. The Navy Secretary's order placed the fledgling school under the direction of the Naval Academy superintendent, who was charged with "securing ample use of the educational plant of the Naval Academy to students and instructors of the school without interfering with the instruction of midshipmen." This translated into two attic rooms being set aside for classroom and laboratory space for the school.

Within three years, Meyer agreed to a proposal to change the school. On October 31, 1912, he signed Navy General Order No. 233, which renamed the school the Postgraduate Department of the Naval Academy. The order established courses of study in ordnance and gunnery, electrical engineering radio telegraphy, naval construction, and civil engineering as well as continuing the original program in marine engineering. With the additional curricula, enrollment increased to 25. Officers who attended the school finished their academic programs at civilian institutions such as Yale, Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Johns Hopkins and Columbia universities.

During World War II, Fleet Admiral Ernest King, chief of naval operations and commander-in-chief of both the Atlantic and Pacific fleets, established a commission to review the role of graduate education in the Navy. The recommendations from this group, the Pye Commission, were regarded highly within the Navy and Congress. In 1945, Congress passed legislation to make the school a fully-accredited, degree-granting graduate institution. Two years later, Congress adopted legislation authorizing the purchase of an independent campus for the school.

A post-war review team, which had examined 25 sites nationwide, had recommended the old Hotel Del Monte as a new home for the Postgraduate School. The Navy had come to Monterey during World War II, leasing the Hotel Del Monte in early 1943 for a preflight training school, and subsequently using the facility for other training programs. Negotiations with the Del Monte Properties Company led to the purchase of the hotel and 627 acres of surrounding land for \$2.13 million.

In December 1951, in a move virtually unparalleled in the history of academe, the Postgraduate School moved lock, stock and wind tunnel across the nation, establishing its current campus in Monterey. The coast-to-coast move involved 500 students, about 100 faculty and staff and thousands of pounds of books and research equipment.

Rear Adm. Ernest Edward Herrmann supervised the move that pumped new vitality into the Navy's efforts to advance naval science and technology.

Since that time, the student population at the Postgraduate School has grown to 1,800, with students coming from all service branches of the U.S. defense community, as well as from the Coast Guard, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the services of more than 25 allied nations. Today, the school provides more than 40 programs of study, ranging from the traditional engineering and physical sciences to the rapidly evolving space science programs.

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